

# 1

## Lesson One

### FOCUS: Biography

The author's life can inform and expand the reader's understanding of a novel. Amy Tan is the daughter of immigrants who fled to America during the Chinese civil war of the 1940s. She grew up negotiating the difference between the world her parents knew in China—hierarchical, fatalistic—and the brash, opportunistic ways of their adopted land. One practice of examining a literary work, biographical criticism, looks through the lens of an author's experience. In this lesson, explore the author's life to understand more fully the novel.



### Discussion Activities

Listen to the Big Read CD. Have students take notes as they listen. Ask them to present the three most important points they learned from the CD. To go more in depth, you might focus on the reflections of one of the commentators.

Copy the following: "Introduction," "Amy Tan," and "World War II and San Francisco's Chinatown" from the Reader's Guide; and Handouts One and Two from this guide. Divide the class into groups. Assign one essay to each group. After reading and discussing the essays, each group will present what members of the group learned. Ask students to add creative twists to make their presentations memorable. Also, ask them to develop one question about the topic not covered in the essay and a suggestion of where a reader might go to find an answer.



### Writing Exercise

Have students write a short story that includes factual details from their parents' or their own lives, as well as elements from their own imagination. Have them select a partner and share their writing with that classmate.



### Homework

Read the first two chapters (pp. 17-48). Using the writing exercise, have students collect stories from their mothers, grandmothers, and/or aunts.